

RARE RECONNAISSANCE TYPE AT EATON SOCON

by Julian Evan Hart

This aircraft was engaged on a photo-reconnaissance mission to Coventry and Birmingham when it was spotted and attacked by Hurricanes of No. 1 Squadron. Flight Lieutenant M.H Brown, Pilot Officer A.V. Clowes and Pilot Officer A. Kershaw repeatedly attacked the Dornier literally peppering it with bullet strikes. Each fighter jinked from side to side behind the bomber to get in a burst of fire. 0.303 bullets strikes spattered into the tail section flaking off the paintwork in large areas around each strike. Elongated and jagged edged holes and tears were created by each impact as well as dents and gouges. More bullets struck along the fuselage and into the cockpit, injuring the crew. There was no way this enemy aeroplane was going to return to base, subjected to such a withering hail of bullets. As the combat passed over the village of Bolnhurst small pieces of burning debris from the Dornier set fire to the roof of a thatched cottage. The enemy aircraft with both engines smoking began a shallow dive before it exploded at low altitude scattering large sections over 120 metres across fields at Little End. The three dead airmen's bodies were collected from the site and for a short period were placed in a local barn. One local lad crept into the poorly lit barn determined to have a look at a Jerry airman. Just as he lifted the corner of a blanket, someone came in and

24th October 1940

LOCATION

Fields beside the Crown Inn at Eaton Socon

TYPE

Dornier Do 215B

SERIAL No.

0060

UNIT

3/Aufklarungs. Gruppe Ober der Luftwaffe (Aufkl.Gr.Ob.d.L.)

PILOT

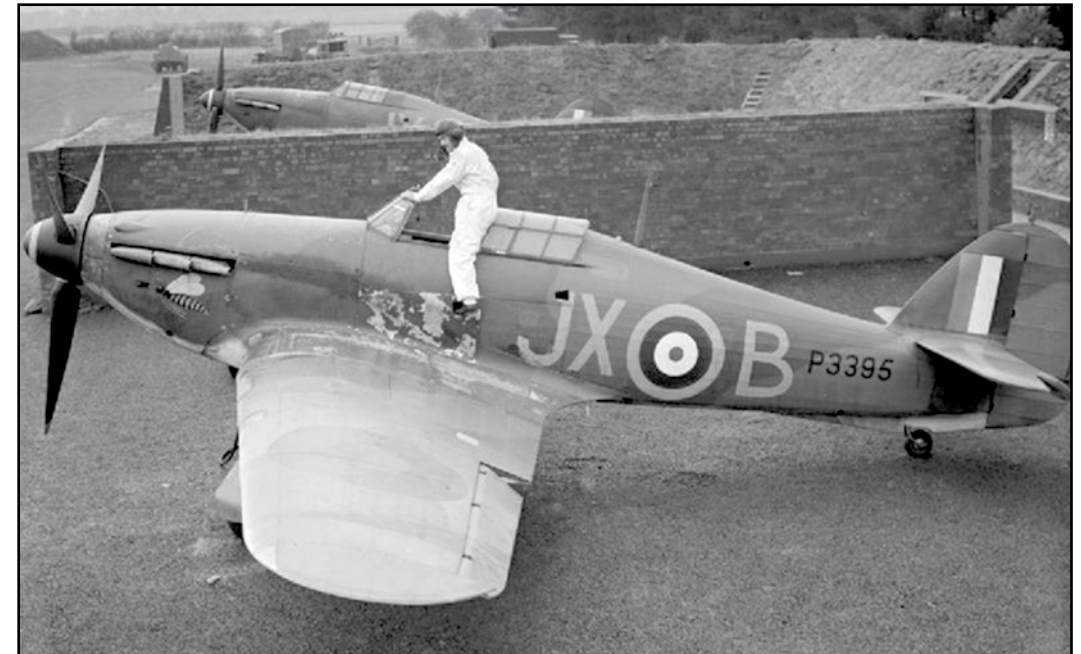
Leutnant E. MAYER - baled out too low and killed

CREW

Gefreiter M. DORR - baled out and captured badly injured

Unteroffizier E. HOFFMANN - baled out too low and killed

Unteroffizier H. BROENING - baled out too low and killed



Above: One of the pilots involved in the shooting down of the Eaton Socon Dornier was Pilot Officer 'Taffy' Clowes seen here with his Hurricane decorated with his famous wasp nose-art.

told him to get out of there. Many years later this eye-witness would recall that one of the things he could clearly remember was that the blanket 'felt very sticky'. Another eye-witness to this event was seven year old John Hughes who lived at nearby Colmworth, he already had some experience of encountering the Luftwaffe when he witnessed the Junkers 88 crash there just some eighteen days previously. Some sixty-nine years later John would recount to the author "I remember hearing all this noise some miles off and looking outside I saw all the aeroplanes wheeling about behind a solitary one.

"I could hear gunfire and suddenly the aeroplane in front caught fire and went down out of sight."

The St Neots Advertiser reported that -

The many people who were in the streets of St. Neots on Thursday (Market Day) had the gratification of seeing a German plane shot down by English planes. The first notification was a burst of gun-fire, and then the planes were seen fighting over Eaton Socon. The enemy plane almost immediately lost height, smoke poured from it, and it fell into a field at Little End, Eaton Socon...On reaching the ground, the plane burst into flames and was soon a wreck. The crew of four all baled out. Three were picked up dead, and the fourth was badly wounded and taken to hospital. All four had been hit by bullets. An eye-witness describes the fight as a 'very clever piece of work.'

(St Neots Advertiser 25th October 1940)

The following week further reports added -

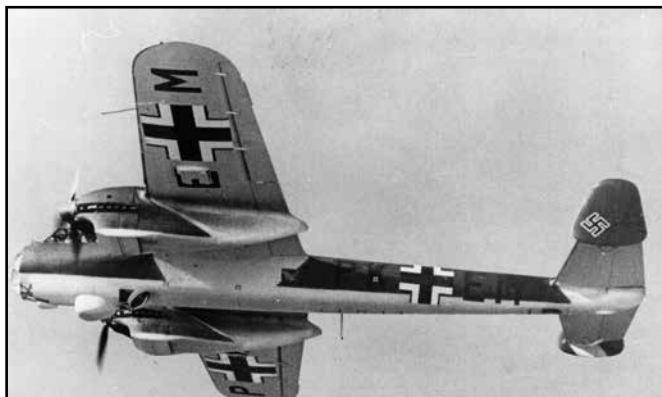
Mr. Albert Mardlin, who was driving a tractor when the wounded airman landed in the field, told a newspaper reporter: "I rushed up to him to see if he was armed. I discovered that he had no weapons of any sort and as I searched him he held his hands in the air and smiled. In one of his pockets he had some cigarettes, so I took one out and gave it to him. The occupants of a farmhouse about a mile away from the scene of the crash were surprised when a door of the plane fell near their house."

(St Neots Advertiser 1st November 1940)

The death and tragedy that spread itself across the fields behind the Crown Inn was not restricted to this Thursday. The very next day a young 16 year old RAF engine fitter Harry Clack and 2nd Class Aircraftman Harold Frank Hooker would also die here whilst a third man Leading Aircraftman James Leatherland would be burned. Harry Clack born in Croydon was just 16 when he was assisting in the recovery of the Dornier's wreckage. Harry and the two other men were assisting in the salvage of one of the Dornier's engines with a recovery crane when the jib touched some over head power lines carrying 11,000 volts, and they were all electrocuted. Harry William Clack had only just completed his accelerated training on October 5th 1940, and was then posted to Cambridge on salvage and repair duties. His tragic death on 25th October 1940 means that Harry Clack was the youngest member of the RAF to die in World War Two as a result of enemy action. He was later buried in plot 6363 in Cambridge City Cemetery. The inquest into this tragic accident was actually held at the Crown Inn just a few yards from where the Dornier fell and a total of five men had been killed.

Excerpts of Coroner's Inquest statements

Corporal Arthur Frank Baker said that on Friday, October 25th, he was in charge of a breakdown gang of eight men. They proceeded to Eaton Socon to pick up a wrecked aircraft. The crane had been taken into the field and was on the job. He went down to see what conveyance was wanted. He looked round and saw three airmen lying on the ground near the crane. He did not see them



Above: The Dornier 215 was very similar in appearance to the Dornier 17, the main difference being the inline engines on the 215 as opposed to radials on the 17.

fall. He shouted for the police and ambulance. A high tension cable ran across the ground, he did not see it until after the accident. The crane had passed beyond the cable when he saw it. He would not have thought the jib of the crane would have come in contact with the cable because of the height of the cable. Aircraftman George Harris deposed.

He drove an RAF crane into a field at Eaton Socon and picked up a damaged aeroplane engine. He had got the engine on the jib and was driving out into the next field when he saw three men running. He stopped as he thought the engine had become unhooked. Instead, he saw three men lying on the ground. On looking up he saw overhead a high tension cable. P.C. Ernest Jakes, Keysoe, said that with P.C. Marlow he was on duty on the Great North Road, Eaton Socon, controlling traffic. He saw the breakdown crane and low lorry arrive to collect the wreckage of the aeroplane. He saw the crane driven into the field and go to the wreckage. There was some difficulty in getting into the field. Later, he heard a shout, went into the field and saw an overhead electric cable swaying about, the jib of the crane was about 3 ft. off the cable. Three men were lying on the ground, all were groaning. One recovered and was taken to hospital. Artificial respiration was tried on the other two men for an hour without avail. The cable poles were 33 ft. high, they carried three wires. From the lowest wire there would be a clearance of 30 ft., but this low wire sagged a bit in the

Below: The charred rear fuselage of the Dornier at Eaton Socon.





Above: The perfect souvenir, the port tail fin of the Dornier complete with swastika and bullet strikes!

middle. There was a mound of earth, about a foot high, underneath the cables, this would be sufficient to raise the crane to come in contact with the cable. As the crane was standing when he went up the top looked almost level with the wire. The cable was not damaged. The cable carried 11,000 volts. There was a big danger notice at the entrance to the field. The coroner could not understand why the driver did not see this, whereby after listening to eye-witness accounts the coroner, Mr R.G. Rose, decided upon a verdict of 'Accidental Death' in each case. According to the St Neots Advertiser as below, the pilot who dealt the Dornier its final blow would himself be killed shortly afterwards.

"Another tragic sequel was the death of the pilot who had dealt the finishing blow to the Dornier that had crashed in Eaton Socon. While engaged in air operations Sergeant-pilot Robert Dudley Hogg, of 59, The Grove, Bedford, son of Mrs. Hogg and the late Dr. E.H. Hogg had been killed. The young pilot had been flying three months and the Dornier was the second bomber he had destroyed."

(St Neots Advertiser Friday November 22nd , 1940)

However research by the author can only come up with the fact that Robert Dudley Hogg died on 11th November 1940 aged 22 whilst with No 17 Squadron RAFVR. Only the names of the three RAF pilots at the beginning of this section can be established as to being directly involved in this Dornier's demise.

The Crash Site Today

Many years ago the author searched the crash site area to the west of the A1 motorway which was built after the crash and now bisects the crash site. Several small fragments of alloy were spotted in the plough soil and two RAF issue brass spoons have been found at the crash site....probably from the crash recovery crew. Several fragments of airframe still bore traces of white green and black paint. Aviation archaeologist Peter Stanley searched the site and found the metal back-plate of a wristwatch and several fired 0.303 bullets from where the Dornier's tail section had lain. However the sections of crash site to the east of the A1 have now been developed in the last decade and extensively built upon.

Below: Military personnel and policemen survey the scattered remains of the Dornier at Eaton Socon.

